United Nations E/2008/66

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
20 May 2008

Original: English

Special meeting on the global food crisis
New York, 20 May 2008

Statement of the President of the Economic and Social Council on the occasion of the special meeting of the Council on the global food crisis

As President of the Economic and Social Council, I am extremely satisfied with our discussions on the global food crisis. While this is just one small step, it has demonstrated how Governments and other stakeholders can respond together in order to address a crisis that threatens millions of the poorest and the most vulnerable.

This special meeting of the Council is its first in response to the responsibilities conferred on it by the 2005 World Summit Outcome. It was my hope, now realized in full measure, that we could contribute to the process of defining a concerted, coordinated and comprehensive response and serve as a bridge between the meetings of the recently concluded Commission on Sustainable Development and the forthcoming meetings to be held in 2008, the High-level Conference on World Food Security in Rome in early June, the substantive session of the Council in July and the high-level event of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals on 25 September. I applaud the measures taken by the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system under the leadership of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, embodied in the outcome of the Berne meeting of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and the subsequent establishment of the United Nations Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis.

Our meeting today has shown that in responding to this complex crisis, all of us have to act together urgently. While we must cope with this situation, we must also put in place policies that can turn a threatening situation into an agricultural renaissance. In our collective action, there is a clear role for Governments, the United Nations system, development banks, non-governmental organizations, the broader civil society, the scientific community, academia, the private sector, philanthropic organizations and the media.

Drawing from our discussions, I am pleased to outline the basic elements that constitute the basis for effective and sustained global action.

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Action now

- We must ensure that funding pledges for emergency food assistance, whether bilateral or through the United Nations system, are delivered urgently. We need to go beyond the need to maintain past levels of delivery and redouble our efforts to get food to the hungry. The Council makes this appeal, not only to donor Governments, but also to private corporations, philanthropic organizations and individuals in a position to make such contributions.

- Affected countries should immediately put in place targeted food and nutrition support measures and social safety nets with priority for maternal, infant and child programmes. The United Nations system, especially at the country level, should respond to the needs of national Governments in this regard, keeping in mind that the response to immediate needs should not compromise the development of future agricultural capacities.

- As a matter of highest priority, we need to give farmers the ability to meet the production needs for the next growing season. Donors and national Governments should respond with speed to these short-term needs in order to ensure that basic seeds, fertilizer and pesticides reach small farmers.

- We urge the research community to bring its knowledge to bear in order to provide a better understanding of the food markets, including the financial markets, speculation and the current food crisis. A deeper understanding will help policymakers to implement meaningful policies in this regard.

- We urge all Member States to show the necessary political will and flexibility to bring about a new trade regime more conducive to food security by encouraging food production and agricultural investments in developing countries. There should be a renewed urgency in concluding the Doha round of negotiations, which should address agricultural subsidies and tariffs of developed countries, with a view to helping agricultural development in poor countries.

Initiating medium- to long-term measures

- We urge donors to re-examine the sectoral allocation of official development assistance, which has seen a dramatic decline in aid for agriculture. The food crisis has highlighted the need for significant support to agricultural development such as improved inputs, better infrastructure, secure land tenure and better organization of poor farmers.

- We urge greater investments in agricultural infrastructure, in particular irrigation, roads, communications, transport and storage facilities. Investing in reducing harvest and post-harvest losses and in agro-industries will increase the food supply and generate income for the rural poor.

- We urge a special concerted effort to address the crisis in Africa, home of the largest number of least developed countries. In this context, we urge substantially increased donor funding for publicly supported research and development, extension and rural infrastructure to boost agricultural productivity. Africa, in particular, should be a major beneficiary of such investments, with an emphasis on research and development on food crops

well suited to local agro-climatic conditions in order to bring about a "green revolution" on the continent.

- We urge the Bretton Woods institutions to consider providing financial support to those low-income developing countries that would initially face adjustment costs and worsening food insecurity from the higher global prices associated with agricultural trade liberalization. We urge the international financial institutions to reform compensatory financing mechanisms to make more resources available for swift disbursement to the countries affected by food price shocks or other terms-of-trade shocks, with minimal conditionality. Debt service suspension should also be considered.

- We urge Governments to seriously rethink biofuel policies in order to ensure that policies to promote biofuels do not jeopardize food security. Appropriate policies will have to be carefully considered and implemented. The net economic impact and the environmental and social impacts need to be balanced and made part of strategic policy in this regard.

- We urge greater regional dialogue and cooperation to enhance regional food security that will facilitate quick responses to local food shortages. In this context, we urge the expansion of South-South cooperation and the exchange of best practices in food security programmes. We recognize the disparate and complex nature of the food crisis and recommend the sharing of experiences and best practices, which will be especially relevant in the regional and subregional contexts.

- We urge enhanced collaboration and exchange with the private sector, foundations and other civil society organizations on innovative programmes to combat hunger and malnutrition. We also urge a stronger partnership with agricultural research centres in order to promote the diffusion of knowledge and technology through the provision of extension services, which are essential for sustained increases in agricultural productivity.

- We call on the organizations of the United Nations system to build on actions already initiated in the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination to promote a unified approach, including through the United Nations Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis.

- We call upon our private sector partners, in particular the food industry, to consider the need to keep food and agricultural inputs affordable for the world's growing population as an important element in their corporate social responsibility strategies.

- We encourage the global philanthropic community to expand grants to partners in the poorest countries geared towards improving agricultural productivity and increasing food production.